

Promoting Democracy In Cuba

On Day Of Solidarity With The Cuban People, President Bush Recognizes And Calls For The Release Of Political Prisoners Of The Regime

Today, President Bush honored the Cuban people with the inaugural Day of Solidarity with the people of Cuba. He also issued a Presidential Proclamation to commemorate those who are suffering in Cuba for their beliefs, especially Cuba's prisoners of conscience. The President reiterated that the United States stands with the brave Cubans who are struggling make their nation democratic, prosperous, and just. President Bush also called for the release of all political prisoners being held in Cuba.

Today, President Bush called on the Cuban regime to make meaningful changes to improve the life for the Cuban people. Cuban rulers should allow their citizens to speak freely in public, watch movies and documentaries produced by Cuban artists who are free to express themselves, and open up access to the Internet.

- Since Raul Castro is allowing Cubans to own mobile phones for the first time, President Bush announced that the U.S. is changing its regulations to allow Americans to send mobile phones to family members in Cuba. If Raul Castro is serious about his so-called reforms, he will allow these phones to reach the Cuban people.
- President Bush repeated his offer to license U.S. non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and faith-based groups to provide computers and internet to the Cuban people – if Cuban rulers will end their restrictions on Internet access.
- Today, President Bush also called on Cuban leaders to make major economic reforms. These reforms must open up Cuba's inefficient state-run markets, give families real choices about what they buy, and institute a free enterprise system that allows ordinary people to benefit from their talents and hard work. Only when they have an economy that makes prosperity possible will Cubans see any real improvements in their daily lives.

The United States Is Reaching Out To The Cuban People

Since 2001, the United States has dramatically stepped up our efforts to promote freedom and democracy in Cuba. Since 2001, the United States has provided \$366 million in such assistance. The United States has substantially increased efforts to get uncensored information to the Cuban people, primarily through Radio and TV Marti, which now broadcast from aircraft and via satellite television as well as on a variety of AM and shortwave frequencies. Today, Cuba remains stuck beneath the personal tyranny of Fidel and Raul Castro, and Cubans' political freedoms have been denied. Families have been torn apart, the economy is in shambles, and Cuban society is crumbling after years of the Castros' neglect.

Real Change In Cuba Requires Political Freedom

Despite the Cuban government's signature in February 2008 of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the regime has not attempted even cosmetic changes on civil and political rights. Political dissidents continue to be harassed, detained, and beaten, and more than 200 prisoners of conscience still suffer in Castro's tropical gulag.

- The United States challenges the Government of Cuba to honor its international human rights commitments by immediately stopping the abuse of its political dissidents, releasing all of its political prisoners, and stopping attacks on independent civil society activists. Systematic brutality and abuse occur in Cuban prisons – abuses that violate the ICCPR as well as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Today, Events Around The World Will Shine A Spotlight On Political Prisoners In Cuba

The Day of Solidarity occurs during a period when Cubans all over the island commemorate Cuban patriots who have suffered at the hands of the regime for the cause of freedom and human rights. It coincides with a period in Cuban

history that marks Cuban Independence Day (May 20), the death of José Martí (May 19, 1895), and the death of Pedro Luis Boitel (May 25, 1972).

- **This day is a chance to honor the culture and history of Cuba and reflect on the continued oppression of the Cuban people.** The United States continues to reach out to the Cuban people, yet life in Cuba will not fundamentally change until the Cuban government does.

While the Cuban regime isolates itself, the Cuban people continue to act with dignity, honor, and courage. Today, President Bush recognized the courage of several political prisoners still serving in Cuba:

- **Luis Enrique Ferrer García, a peaceful pro-democracy activist, was the Coordinator of the Christian Liberation Movement in the province of Las Tunas.** He was arrested and sentenced to 28 years for collecting signatures for his organization's Varela Project that is a constitutionally-based civic initiative calling for a referendum on democratic reforms and respect for basic freedom. His prison conditions are harsh.
- **Oscar Elias Biscet is a doctor and advocate of non-violence who has led a movement in favor of human rights.** For this, Dr. Biscet serves a 25-year sentence under harsh conditions. He was once in solitary confinement for over seven months. He is in poor health and is allowed very few visitors.
- **Ricardo Gonzalez Alfonso was arrested for writing things that the Cuban authorities did not like and sentenced to 20 years in prison.**
- **Jose Luis Garcia Paneque was sentenced to 24 years in prison for daring to speak the truth about the regime.**
- **Jorge Luis Gonzalez Tanquero was arrested and is serving time inside a Cuban prison, charged with crimes against the state after defending the human rights of his countrymen.**
- **Normando Hernandez, a writer and independent journalist, was arrested in March 2003 and sentenced to 25 years' imprisonment for reporting on the conditions of state-run services in Cuba and for criticizing the government's management of issues.**
- **Ariel and Guido Sigler Amaya are two brothers and pro-democracy activists arrested during the Cuba's March 2003 "Black Spring" crackdown on dissidents and sentenced to 25 and 20 years of prison, respectively.** Their brother Miguel, in the audience today, was also sentenced and imprisoned the same time, but later released.
- **Every Sunday, Cuba's *Damas de Blanco*, or "Ladies in White," march in silent protest, demanding the release of their husbands.** A few weeks ago, when about a dozen of these women held a peaceful sit-in at a public park, they were dragged from the area by a large pro-regime mob. One of the abused "Damas" was Berta Soler, whose husband, Juan Angel Moya Acosta, is serving a 20-year sentence.